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SUBJECT: SENEGAL FOOD SECURITY THREATENED BY CEREAL AND FORAGE
DEFICITS

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¶1. SUMMARY: Senegal's food security for the remainder of the dry season in 2008 is threatened by the effects of late and erratic rains that ended early in many areas throughout Senegal in 2007. The net effect has been a reduced cereal crop (sorghum, millet and rice) and an acute shortage of forage crops for livestock. A multi-agency food security task force recently reported that outside of Dakar, the cereal shortage is estimated at 1.08 million tons, of which approximately 800,000 should be met by commercial trade and a small amount (10,000 tons) by foreign donations, leaving a net deficit of approximately 269,000 tons. Meanwhile, high world commodity prices have led the Government of Senegal to issue a decree fixing the profit margin on the importation and distribution of rice, which is the country's most important imported cereal. END SUMMARY.

SENEGAL'S FOOD SECURITY AT RISK

¶2. The National Food Security Council, on behalf of a multi-agency taskforce, recently reported that outside of Dakar, there is a cereal shortage of 1.08 million tons. Approximately 800,000 tons of this deficit is expected to be met by commercial trade (mostly rice) and a small amount (10,000 tons) by regular foreign donations. The net deficit is estimated at 269,000 tons. The departments of Saint Louis, Louga, Thies, Mbacke, Tivaouane and Kebemer are the worst off with food stores of only two months or less. While The World Food Program (WFP) is preparing to do a follow-up confirmatory survey, the Government of Senegal has yet to ask the international community for emergency food assistance.

¶3. In 2007 Senegal experienced late and erratic rains that ended early in many areas. The rainfall deficit reduced cereal crop production (sorghum, millet and rice) and significantly reduced forage crops for livestock. In addition to a lack of rainfall, the 2007 cereal crops, harvested during the last quarter of 2007, faced high pest pressure, including grain eating birds in the northern river valley where the majority of rice is grown. Inputs such as fertilizer and pesticide also arrived late in many areas. There was also isolated flooding along the Senegal River that destroyed many irrigated crops. A growing fear in advance of the next production campaign is that many farmers will have consumed their seed stock.

¶4. In anticipation of an early-start of the hunger season ("soudure," as it is known in Senegal), a food security task force was set up by the Government under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, composed of the Ministry of Family, the Food Security Commissariat, the Statistics Service and

the National Association of Rural Communities (ANCR). This commission was established on December 19, 2007 by Prime Minister Soumare with the main objective of rebuilding security stocks and planning its distribution throughout the country, with priority to most affected regions (central, southern, and northern).

CASH CROPS, LIVESTOCK AND ENVIRONMENT ALSO IMPACTED

¶15. The effect on peanut production, the primary cash crop in Senegal, is mixed - some production areas received adequate rainfall while farmers in some areas lost their entire crop. Senegal produces a small amount of cotton which appears to have been spared as most of it is grown in the Tambacounda area which received relatively normal rainfall. Cotton production is still down from last year's record level, however. Beyond cash, cereal, and traditional forage crops, there are important forest areas that are expected to face increasing strain and pressure, as herders/livestock migrate in search of pasture. While food crops can be imported and distributed, the lack of forage and distribution problems faced by a nomadic animal herders leave them little recourse other than to migrate south.

¶16. Considering the cereal and fodder deficits, the task force recommended, among others, immediate assistance in food aid and cattle fodder in the most affected areas, subsidizing prices for cattle feed, coordination among food relief institutions, and support for agricultural inputs especially in vegetable growing areas.

INCREASED SUFFERING EXPECTED, RURAL AND URBAN

¶17. The ultimate effect is rising food prices (and acute food insecurity in some areas), an acute shortage of animal feed, and a potential shortage of seed stock which is exacerbated by poor distribution networks and very high world food prices. The local cereal and forage deficit has arrived amid a long and steady climb in world commodity prices. Dakar's major wheat millers, which also produce animal feed as a by-product of flour, are facing a backlog

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in demand. Looking forward, they are finding it increasingly difficult to secure wheat at prices that are feasible given local price controls on flour and bread. Dating back to October 2007, the government has taken gradual steps to curb the rising cost of many imported staples, such as wheat, rice, milk powder, vegetable oil and sugar by lowering many duties and waiving value-added taxes. Still, local processors such as millers and bakers feel their profits squeezed between the rising cost of inputs and fixed prices for their products. Recently, the Government of Senegal issued a decree fixing the profit margin on the importation and distribution of rice, which is the most important imported cereal.

¶18. While there may be food in Senegal's cities, it comes at an increasingly high price. Adding to the problem in urban areas is a reported influx of migrants from the countryside, many arriving in desperation after the poor harvest, building on an existing trend of economic migration from traditional rural livelihoods. The strains of the current situation will continue to grow until the rains arrive in July. Presumably emergency food aid and distribution will be needed sooner.

¶19. Despite the lack of an official GOS request for food aid, the international NGO World Vision has already contacted Peace Corps Senegal to request assistance in implementing a new food-for-work program to help address obvious localized food shortages.

COMMENT

¶10. The social frustrations in Senegal are mounting due to higher fuel, electricity, and food prices. Poor harvests and reduced incomes in rural areas will exacerbate the situation. We would not be surprised to see grass-roots protests, similar to what happened last week in Burkina Faso with the potential for disturbances in major cities as a result of increases in the price of food. With local elections slated for May, it is likely that the government's agricultural policy, or lack thereof, will be scrutinized by the

opposition in an attempt to use it to bolster their argument that the ruling PDS has mismanaged the country's resources and is not serious about reducing rural poverty. Any significant USG response to Senegal's current food insecurity will require the GOS to first admit there is a problem and declare an agriculture/food catastrophe.

SMITH